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INTERVIEWEE: Jacob Sanders

INTERVIEWER: Michelle McKenzie

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McKenzie: My name is Michelle McKenzie and I am at William H. Turner Technical Arts High School on February 14, 2006 to interview Jacob Sanders about his personal story. Mr. Sanders, can you please describe when and where you were born and a little bit about your parents and grandparents?

Sanders: Well, I was born in Ocilla, Georgia, (?) east Georgia they call it. And my mother-- and my mother, she was a housewife. My father, he worked down in University of Miami. He started working, I think down where University of Miami south campus is now. It was a blimp base, he was working for the government when they built the base there, and when the government turned it over to the University of Miami, he kept the same job there at the University of Miami as a (fireman?). (?). And that's where he retired at, there at the University of Miami.

M: Okay. When did you move to Miami?

S: Nineteen thirty-five.

M: Okay. And what part of town did you move to?

S: Coconut Grove.

M: Coconut Grove.

S: Thirty-five fifty-nine Thomas Avenue.

[audience laughs]

M: Okay. Describe the earliest memories of life in our city.

S: Well, in the Grove there, it was kind of a unique town to me because the people there- the white people there- they was more or less involved with the children somewhat (to speak?) and the-- I can remember distinctly there was a lady, she had a couple of mango trees in her yard and I used to make little wagons, you know, to push around to get mangoes and coconuts, you know, because I've always been, I guess you'd say, an entrepreneur, you know. I would get the mangos and coconuts and I would sell them, you know, when the tourists come down, down to Virginia Key because they had seaplanes down there at-- not Virginia Key, I'm sorry, at Dinner Key, because there was seaplanes down there where Monty Trainer is now. That where seaplanes used to come in at Pan American Airlines, they had seaplanes there. And this lady, she would catch me in a tree and she'd say, "I told you to stay out of my trees", you know, this type of thing and so on. I'd say, "Well I just want to get a few mangoes", and she would give me the mangoes and tell me to go sell them and come back and bring her the money and I would go, come back and maybe give her maybe a dollar or something and she would give me seventy-five cents and she'd keep the quarter, you know.

M: Okay. Did you ever face segregation?

S: Oh, yes, we had segregation there because on the buses-- riding the buses, you know, going to and from-- you know. I didn't have too much problem with it during my school time, but my mother, she had that problem. When I grew up and started shopping, you

know, for myself, then you had to sit to the rear of the bus. You had to pay-- sometimes you had to pay your money at the front door, then go around the back and come in through the back door of the bus, you know, this type of thing.

M: Is there any particular haunting memory about discrimination or separation of the races?

S: The separation was-- you know, we had our area that we lived in and there was a place there from the Grove they called 'Coral Gables' and you was not allowed at Coral Gables after dark, you know. And there was a golf course out there, Riviera Country Club and I used to go out there as a kid when I was in school and caddy on the weekends, sometimes in the evening after school and if you was caught walking-- you had to walk through the Gables to get back to Coconut Grove and if the police would see you and catch you, you know, walking there, and they would take you down to the precinct. But it so happens that we had a retired judge out of the golf course and they would call-- his name was Kirkland, Judge Kirkland. And they would call Judge Kirkland and Judge Kirkland, you know, he says, "Hey, turn my boys loose. They're my boys. They ain't no problem. Let them go. They're working boys, let them go home. Don't bother them boys", you know, this type of thing. So, he was good in that sense, you know, this type of thing.

M: Okay. Can you tell me what do you remember about the local or national efforts to bring full civil rights to black Americans?

S: My first-- my first really, um, experience in bringing the rights to the black was Harry S. Truman, I think he was president at the time. And during the summertime, when I-- because I went off to boarding school for private school in seventh grade up in a little town they call 'Eatonville', which was organized, incorporated by blacks and still being

or-- being ran by black folks and it's one of the oldest towns where blacks (are?) organized. And when-- when you come-- you know, I would come home during the summertime, I would work Navy-- on the Navy base, Opalaka Navy Station and when-- I think it was in 19-- if I'm not mistaken, 1945 when Truman happened to take all the black and white sign down on the government bases- on the military bases- because they had a sign there for drinking water, you know, 'Colored Only', 'White Only', and I remember him distinctly passing that law, you know, to remove all signs from the water fountain on all military bases, this type of thing.

M: Okay. When you were in school, how did your school handle the effort to integrate?

S: The integration for the schools-- no, that didn't come while I was in school- the integration didn't come about while I was in high school. They didn't come about it-- they came about it after I came out of high school.

M: Okay. What thoughts do you have about the changes that were made in the 1950s and 1960s?

S: In the '50s, they-- well, they had the riot (?). And when they first started letting us ride the-- they passed the law to-- I forget the year that was to (desegregate?) the buses, they was segregated. And you-- it was kind of-- it mostly involved in that particular situation where the younger kids demanded to sit to the front of the bus. And I remember the boys in the Anderson Family, there was two brothers and they refused to sit to the back of the bus, and they just demanded to sit to the front of the bus and sometimes the bus driver would call the policeman, you know, this type of thing, and-- but they would just take them off the bus. I don't recall them taking them to jail or anything like that, you know. In the same time, I think-- of course, that was way after in the '60s. In '62, I think I was

working at-- out on Virginia Beach in ’62 when they started allowing blacks to drive the city buses and I was working at the county at that time as a truck driver because they started hiring us first as truck drivers and the first job they offered me to try to disencourage me from taking the job, they made me go all the way to Homestead to go to work. So, I took the job anyway, because I wasn’t gonna let them out-do me, you know, this type of thing. So, I took that job and they said if we get an opening, we’ll bring you back up on this end, you know. So, I was driving-- truck driving and then the-- the opening came up for the bus drivers, you know, so I signed up to drive bus and I didn’t drive bus too long because I just couldn’t take it, it was just a little too much for me, I couldn’t handle that, you know, the way the segregation was because they didn’t respect you , you know, if you got a-- say you was driving and you go to work to first start to work on there on the bus, you did what they call, ‘running the triples’ with the extra buses that take the load off the regular buses during the busy hours, you know, in the morning and in the afternoon. So-- and you go home-- in the morning, you work--come to work at five o’clock and you go home and you come back in the afternoon about two o’clock, you know, to drive the triples, they called it. And-- so, one particular morning, your name-- the names rotates but the jobs, you know, would stay in one spot, so your name would come at whatever work was available at that time, you know, you had to pick a spot. So, this particular morning, my name was at an eight-hour run, so I didn’t have to ride on the triples, you know, I could pull an eight-hour run. So, but, the dispatcher, he gave the eight-hour run to the guy that reported after me. My reporting time said it was 5:03, his reporting time was 5:06, so they gave him the run and wanted to give me the triple. I said, “No man, I’m supposed to be next, I’m supposed to have the

run." He said, "Well, if you don't like the way this thing is running, you know what you can do, you can just go someplace else and get you a job, or you speak to the supervisor, you know." So, when the supervisor-- I didn't go to work that morning I wouldn't work that morning, I waited until the supervisor came in and so when the supervisor came in and I was telling him about it, he says, "Well, we didn't ask you fellas to come over here." That's the words he said. He said, "If you don't like the way the dispatcher is running the business, go back where you was working at before." And I said "Well, that's what I do", I can't repeat the words that I told him, you know, because I don't have to take this. And that's why I stopped driving the bus, but it got better as time went on, you know, but I just couldn't-- I wouldn't tolerate that, what he was doing at that time.

M: Okay, speaking of segregation, I know that you wanted like every other black person equal rights among the people as a whole as well as, um, just as the rights of the white race. So, did you ever protest or ever think about protesting?

S: I protested a certain degree but I couldn't-- I was not the type to got out there and-- my thing, I can't turn the check the other cheek, you know, I refuse to do that, you know, so I just-- I think different folks are built to do different things, you know. I would do what I could otherwise, but as far as going out there protesting and letting them hit on me and kick me, you know, I'm gonna fight back. So, (I should?) rather than to go out and take the chance of getting hurt, I'll have to hurt somebody, I'll let somebody else to that. (I'll stay back and?) do what I can do otherwise, you know, that was my thing.

M: Okay. Now I want to talk about Virginia Key Beach. And you told me that you worked there?

S: Yes.

M: How long did you work at Virginia Key Beach?

S: I started working at-- I worked at Virginia Key Beach, I guess maybe a couple of years, because Dan Johnson, he was in charge of Virginia Beach there, and I worked at a concession stand there at Virginia Beach, because I always thought I was a cook, you know, this type of thing. Still do, you know, do a little cooking. And he put me working in the concession stand cooking the hamburgers and all the hotdogs and stuff like that.

M: Okay. Speaking of Virginia Key Beach, while you were working there, describe the scene of the African-Americans at the beach- the scenery, the environment.

S: Well, at Virginia Key Beach, it was very pleasant over there because we was thrilled to death to have it-- have the beach because we didn't have any other place to go swimming unless you go to what we called the 'swimming holes', you know, people always do that, this type of thing. And-- but, the-- you could-- at Virginia Key Beach, you had the-- on the other crossing-- on the other side, you could see the whites over there, you know, swimming, enjoying the beach. But, they had a lot of facilities over there that we didn't have on Virginia Key Beach. It was much nicer over there on that side, but we just enjoyed the beach, going out there swimming and they had the merry-go-round and they had the-- an area for dancing, you know, (?) the jukebox playing, you know, and this type of thing. They had the train, the train that run around in through the tunnels and all of this, you know, they even had softball fields out there, playing softball, they go out there and play softball and I do remember they had the-- they had I think it was two or three buildings, wooden buildings that they moved to Virginia Key and they used them as a-- if you-- if they wanted to allow you to stay there, if you say it's qualified to stay in one of those while your at the beach or during vacation time, but most of the time, they was used

for entertainers, because I remember, like, Louis Jordan (living?) staying over there, and other entertainers, you know, most of it that's what they used it for. But, it was very pleasant over there, we enjoyed it, we enjoyed it very much.

M: Okay. I know this has been a very short interview, but is there one more story about your life that you would want to share?

S: In high school, I was going to school at Carver. My mother then sent me to a private school up in Eatonville where I was--

END OF INTERVIEW